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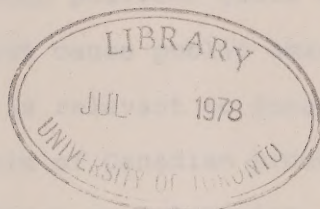
# **Symposium on Television Violence**

## **Colloque sur la violence à la télévision**

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**SOCIAL USES OF MEDIA IN CANADA\***

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\*one of a series of papers prepared by the following researchers:

David Balcon	Catherine Richards
Michèle Baril	Roger Richer
Normand Gamache	Susan Schachter
John Horvath	Janet Solberg
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Views expressed in these papers do not necessarily reflect those of the Canadian Radio-Television Commission

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**Donald Gordon Centre, Queens University, Kingston, Ont.**

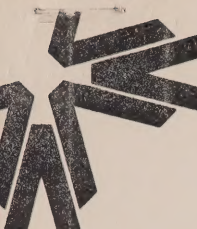
Canadian Radio-Television  
Commission

Conseil de la Radio-Télévision  
Canadienne









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## INTRODUCTION

There is little discussion of positive control principles in the literature and debate on negative aspects of mass media content. This paper proposes a survey of some of those objectives and elements in Canadian broadcasting which are related to positive social or cultural goals. There would appear to be a relationship between broadcasting directed towards such positive goals and freedom from types of programming which cause public anxiety. It is in this framework that it is relevant to focus on the positive social role of Canadian broadcasting in a discussion of violence on television.

This paper is, therefore, a brief survey of the social and cultural objectives and related activities of two sectors: the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, and the field of community media.

Such activities, whether related to whole networks, individual stations, or programs or series have proceeded from conscious social or cultural goals. This paper is a semi-historical reminder of the principles that govern the actions of these elements and the roles they have played. No attempt has been made to tackle the monumental task of





evaluating their success in reaching their goals. In drawing attention to the socially directed forms of broadcasting that have developed with Canadian public energy and support it is hoped to strengthen this approach as one way of improving what Canadians see.





## The Principles of Public Broadcasting

Since 1929 the development of Canadian public broadcasting has been intimately linked with the objectives set out for the entire Canadian broadcasting system. While methods of achieving these goals have been and continue to be the subject of debate among the federal government, provincial governments and private industry, there has been remarkable consensus on the goals themselves.

The continuing needs that only a service with clear public interest goals could meet were reviewed by the first Royal Commission on broadcasting, the Aird Commission in 1929:

In our survey of conditions in Canada, we have heard the present radio situation discussed from many angles with considerable diversity of opinion. There has, however, been unanimity on one fundamental question -- Canadian radio listeners want Canadian broadcasting. This service is at present provided by stations owned by private enterprise and ... operated by the licensees for purposes of gain or for publicity in connection with the licensees' business....

In a country of the vast geographical dimensions of Canada, broadcasting will undoubtedly become a great force in fostering a national spirit and interpreting national citizenship.

At the conclusion of our inquiries, it is our task... to suggest the means as to how broadcasting can be carried out in the interest of Canadian listeners and in the national interest of Canada....

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We are impelled to the conclusion that these interests can be adequately served only by some form of public ownership, operation and control behind which is the national power and prestige of the whole public of the Dominion of Canada."<sup>1</sup>

Successive Canadian parliaments decided that broadcasting should be an instrument of national purpose. In introducing the bill to create the Canadian Radio Broadcasting Commission in 1932, Prime Minister Bennett said:

"First of all, this country must be assured of complete Canadian control of broadcasting from Canadian sources, free from foreign interference or influence. Without such control radio broadcasting can never become a great agency for communication of matters of national concern and for the diffusion of national thought and ideals, and without such control it can never be the agency by which national consciousness may be fostered and sustained and national unity still further strengthened...

Secondly, no other scheme than that of public ownership can ensure to the people of this country, without regard to class or place, equal enjoyment of the benefits and pleasures of radio broadcasting. Private ownership must necessarily discriminate between densely and sparsely populated areas...

Then there is a third reason... The use of the air... that lies over the soil or land of Canada is a natural resource... I cannot think that any government would be warranted in leaving the air to private exploitation and not reserving it for development for the use of the people".<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Aird Commission Report, Royal Commission on Radio Broadcasting (Ottawa: Kings Printer 1929) p.6

<sup>2</sup> Debates, May 18, 1932, pg 3035-6 as cited by Frank W. Peers, The Politics of Canadian Broadcasting - 1920- 1951 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969), pp 101-102.





The amount of public support for a Canadian public broadcasting system cannot be over-estimated. In 1930 Graham Spy and Alan Plaunt organized the Canadian Radio League as a broad-based, public, non-partisan group in support of the Aird Committee recommendations. The League's rallying of public support and their intelligent articulation of public goals greatly influenced the creation of both the Canadian Radio Broadcasting Corporation, 1932 and the CBC, 1936.

The CBC maintained the CRBC's total operating and policy-marking responsibility for both public and private elements of the broadcasting system. In 1958 the Broadcasting Act changed this situation by creating the Board of Broadcast Governors which was to be responsible for regulating the activities of public and private broadcasting stations in Canada and for "ensuring the continued existence and efficient operation of a national broadcasting system and the provision of a varied and comprehensive broadcasting service of a high standard that is basically Canadian in content and character".<sup>3</sup>

However, this legislation provided the CBC specifically with no more clearly defined role than "operating a national broadcasting service". How this broad mandate should be defined and interpreted was left largely up to the Corporation itself.

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<sup>3</sup> Broadcasting Act (1958), Section 10.





This exercise in self-definition was reflected, to some degree, in statements of the Massey and Fowler Commissions of 1951 and 1957:

"The national system,... has constantly kept in view its three objectives for broadcasting in Canada: an adequate coverage of the entire population, opportunities for Canadian talent and for Canadian self-expression generally, and successful resistance to the absorption of Canada into the general cultural pattern of the United States. Much remains to be done, but the record of the past fourteen years is most encouraging."<sup>4</sup>

"In Canada, there appear to be four principal functions which we expect our broadcasters to discharge. They are, first, to inform (news, public events, the reporting of facts); secondly to enlighten (interpretation of the news, education, discussion, debate on the facts); thirdly, to entertain (enjoyment, relaxation); and fourthly, to sell goods (advertising, distribution of goods and services). Any broadcaster who performs only one of these functions and none of the others, is not a good broadcaster. Furthermore, there must be balance between the various components in each of the broad functions referred to above. A broadcaster who provides his audience with nothing but XVIth century music and Ibsenish dramas is no better than the broadcaster who never moves out of tin-pan alley and the cops-and-robbers theatre."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Massey Commission Report, Royal Commission on National Development in The Arts, Letters and Sciences, 1951 P. 40.

<sup>5</sup> Fowler Commission Report, Royal Commission on Broadcasting, 1957, p. 44.



By the mid 1960s, the fundamental objectives for the Canadian broadcasting system had become more clearly defined.

- . the public should be offered a wide and varied choice of program;
- . all programming should be of high quality;
- . broadcasters should be responsible for the great influence of their programming on individuals and society;
- . broadcasting has national responsibilities and must awaken Canadians to Canadian realities.<sup>6</sup>

The Fowler Committee and the White Paper of 1966 were much more precise about the CBC's mandate as an instrument of public policy in broadcasting.

"The CBC is the chosen instrument for public broadcasting in Canada. It is only a part of the Canadian Broadcasting system; the private broadcasters also receive rights to use public assets and, in accepting those rights, assume responsibilities to the national purpose of the system. However, the CBC has the primary responsibility for providing excellent broadcasting services to the Canadian people..."<sup>7</sup>

The responsibilities that they propounded for the Corporation in terms of coverage, language services and programming, including the obligation to awaken within the Canadian body politic a sense of our own identity and a realization of the need to resist the unhealthy excesses of cultural encroachment from abroad, were later formulated by Parliament into a Broadcasting Policy for Canada in the 1968 Act.

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<sup>6</sup> Fowler Committee Report, 1965, p. 17.

<sup>7</sup> Fowler Committee Report, 1965, p. 123





The separation of the regulatory and supervisory function from the CBC was further clarified by this Act which gave this function to the newly created Canadian Radio-Television Commission, an independent regulatory agency. This Act nevertheless maintains that the Canadian broadcasting system is a single system; and that the basic objectives are the same for both the public and private elements.

The Act sets out the objectives for the entire broadcasting system:

- (a) the Canadian broadcasting system should be effectively owned and controlled by Canadians so as to safeguard, enrich and strengthen the cultural, political, social and economic fabric of Canada;
- (b) all persons licensed to carry on broadcasting undertakings have a responsibility for programs they broadcast but the right to freedom of expression and the right of persons to receive programs, subject only to generally applicable statutes and regulations, is unquestioned;
- (c) the programming provided by the Canadian broadcasting system should provide reasonable balanced opportunity for the expression of differing views on matters of public concern, and the programming provided by each broadcaster should be of high standard, using predominantly Canadian creative and other resources;
- (d) all Canadians are entitled to broadcasting service in English and French as public funds become available;

And it specifically sets out objectives for the CBC:

- (e) there should be provided, through a corporation established by Parliament for the purpose, a national broadcasting service that is predominantly Canadian in content and character;





- (f) the national broadcasting service should
  - (i) be a balanced service of information, enlightenment and entertainment for people of different ages, interests and tastes covering the whole range of programming in fair proportion.
  - (ii) be extended to all parts of Canada, as public funds become available;
  - (iii) be in English and French, serving the special needs of geographic regions, and actively contributing to the flow and exchange of cultural and regional information and entertainment, and
  - (iv) contribute to the development of national unity and provide for a continuing expression of Canadian identity;

Since the 1929 Aird Commission the fundamental principles have remained: to provide Canadian broadcasting, that is Canadian programs with Canadian content; to exchange programs within Canada, that is Canadians speaking to Canadians; and to bring the broadcasting service within reach of all Canadians, not just in the most profitable urban border areas. There are few who would argue after over 40 years that the public interest is not better served by a system with such articulated goals than by one operating exclusively on principles of commercial discipline.



'Access' is usually thought of when community use of media is mentioned. And 'access' usually means a chance to speak into the mass conventional broadcasting system. Anthony Smith points out an essential contradiction in this approach. Conventional television is designed to deliver a mass audience. Access may widen the spectrum of service offered, but will likely at the same time narrow the audience base.<sup>8</sup> It is very difficult if not impossible, to have a wide access door reach a mass broadcast audience.

This type of access door does exist more frequently at the local or regional level. In 1957, a private television broadcaster CKNX, in Wingham, Ontario, was willing to have his station used for a "Farm Forum" television experiment. In 1971, a private station in Bathurst, N.B., donated time to a group called "Télépublik" for regular programming. An Alberta Native Communications society has been programming since 1966 and now has time on commercial stations in Camrose, Edmonton, Peace River and Yellowknife.

Besides these individual arrangements between stations and programming groups, there have been a few attempts by broadcasters themselves to provide similar kinds of access in regular programming. Such programs were designed to serve

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<sup>8</sup>Anthony Smith, The Shadow in the Cave, A study of the relationship between the broadcaster, his audience and the state (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1973) p. 267.





individuals and groups who did not want to program a regular series themselves, and who wanted to speak through the conventional broadcast media, rather than the community channel on cable.

The CBC ran a series called "Access" on its English language network in the summer of 1974. Individuals or groups applied, were screened, and if selected were allowed to exercise as much direct control as possible over content and presentation. CITY-TV, an independent UHF station in Toronto, offered two such programs in 1972. Catch 79 was for groups, and Free for All was for individuals. The latter program put to good advantage the unpredictability of free and open access. Within laws covering slander and obscenity, it provided a simple soap box approach to any individual within the audience wanting to speak. All these approaches to access contribute to one basic goal of the Canadian broadcasting system - the goal of diversity. The opportunity for many different voices to speak. But they do not often possess the characteristics that have come to be associated with community use of media.

The most distinguishing feature of community use of broadcasting is its emphasis on participation, involvement, and two-way communication. Conventional broadcasting has been criticized



for locating its mass audience at the end of a one-way communication process, a condition by which its success has traditionally been measured. For this reason, groups interested in using the electronic media for participation have often used it in non-broadcast ways such as video techniques for specific group-to-group communications. Although this paper must necessarily be restricted to broadcast uses, the interest of these groups in other kinds of communication services such as high frequency radio telephone networks is often a priority. These services are usually more flexible, and accept two-way participation more readily.

The history of media used for participation, the demands for 'access', the breakdown of the distinctions between audience or subject matter and the program producer has had an uneven development. The significant events include the use of radio and films discussion groups, film and video used for social intervention, the community channel on cable television and community groups owning and operating broadcast stations.

Film was the visual mass medium before television. By the early forties the National Film Board, created in 1939, had already developed a unique distribution system, a series of film circuits in rural and remote areas. In 1944 The Board





co-ordinated showings to coincide with every fourth radio Farm Forum<sup>9</sup> broadcast and discussion group. For example while groups discussed a broadcast on credit unions and credit facilities, the Film Board would circulate its film The Peoples' Bank.

Another step towards using film as a tool for social interaction was made in the early fifties when viewing groups on the NFB film circuits were developed into discussion groups around the films themselves: **short**, open-ended films were designed to provoke discussion; the group's chairman became responsible for a discussion method. In 1971 the NFB revived this technique for a series for French-speaking audiences entitled "Ciné-Participation".

Interest in self-help and informal education has been a great influence in developing the participation capacities of mass media. The Canadian Association for Adult Education was primarily responsible for the rural group-listening program National Farm Radio Forum which started in the early days of CBC radio in 1941. "Read-Listen-Discuss-Act" was both its motto and a description of the process. The Forum supplied topics for discussion and written material for background. Broadcasts brought together experts on the air who sometimes answered questions submitted by the audience. Discussion

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9 This radio program is discussed in more detail below.



might lead to action projects suggested from programs. It was a highly successful project. In Ontario alone, 140 new co-operatives for wholesale purchasing of farm supplies were organized between 1941 and 1948. In addition, at least two dozen credit unions and a number of municipal medical services were launched. Although the Farm Forum's techniques were widely copied in many parts of the world, the use of film and video to aid social change became the next major focus for development in Canada.

The personal experiences of a number of film makers with the impact of more conventional film production helped initiate some basic principles of film and video use for social change and interaction. In 1962, the French section of the National Film Board produced A Saint-Henri le cinq Septembre, a study of a poor Montreal neighbourhood. When the film was distributed and televised, it provoked a violent negative reaction from the people who had been filmed.

"They felt debased by the outsider's observations of them. Worse yet, certain people who played a role in the film felt deeply and personally hurt. One of the families that had been filmed, for example, was overcome with a shame so strong that they decided to remove their children from the local school."<sup>10</sup>

In 1966, the federal Privy Council, in relation to the War on Poverty, asked the English production unit of the NFB to make

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<sup>10</sup> Fernand Dansereau, "Saint-Jérôme: the experience of a film-maker as social animator". Newsletter Challenge for Change Vol. I, No. 3 (Montreal: Challenge for Change, 1968-69) pp. 4-5.





a film that would help the population understand poverty. Tanya Ballentine lived for three weeks with a poor Montreal family of twelve filming The Things I Cannot Change. When the film appeared on television the children and parents were teased and mocked: the experience marked the whole family with bitterness.<sup>11</sup> The next two projects to deal with these fundamental problems were Saint-Jérôme (1966) produced under the Groupe de Recherches Sociales, and the Fogo Island experiment under the Challenge for Change program in 1967. Both projects maintained the principle that the individual's permission must be obtained before shooting, and that individuals also had the right to pre-screen and exercise editorial control. The film-maker animator was personally responsible for his/her film which was considered an "intercession" or "record". The film was only part of the process; the animator had to stand by the screen and personally respond to the discussion that followed in group screenings with the actual subjects. This technique was used to slowly build a social consensus. The achievements of the Fogo Island project have been well documented and were highly influential in directing community use of media elsewhere.

In 1969, at the same time as the CRTC first suggested that CATV systems provide a community programming channel, Société Nouvelle/Challenge for Change was formally given a mandate. It focused on communications and social change.

<sup>11</sup> Dorothy Forbes, William Tooley, Donald Cameron, Opening the Closed Circuit. (Toronto: The United Church. Publishing House, 1974) p.6



Challenge for Change felt that there should be a working model for community television. It began to work with local groups in three major cable television projects, Town Talk in Thunder Bay Ontario in 1970, Metro Media Association in Vancouver in 1971 and The Institute for Urban Studies in Winnipeg Manitoba in 1971.

Metro Media functions as an umbrella group aimed at providing citizen groups with an understanding of available communication techniques. With the help of Challenge for Change, it trained people and programmed regularly on cable.

The Institute of Urban Studies at the University of Winnipeg used VTR as an organizing tool, providing tapes to groups. In Working with Challenge for Change and cable they wanted to explore the new 'unicity' concept of city government by seeing to what degree people could be involved in the electoral process, to expose candidates and enable citizens to influence policy.

Société Nouvelle's working hypothesis was to see if community television could become a permanent communication infrastructure for the Normandin Region in Quebec. The people of the region were already familiar with broadcast television as an instrument of social action through their experience with TEVEC, Television





Educative du Québec. This participatory education program in 1968/69 had used both animators and citizen committees. Société Nouvelle itself had completed a film project of the Saguenay-Lac St-Jean, "Region 80", a cinematic inventory to develop a system of communication. By building on this groundwork they were able to help form a successful community television co-operative on the following principles:

It is one thing to be a cable owner and produce programs, and another thing to make cable available to the community for broadcasting programs they produce.

It is one thing for an organization like the Quebec Federation of Labor, a school commission or a town council to be in charge of producing programs, and it is another thing for the community to designate people to oversee community programming.

It is one thing to produce programs for the pleasure of producing them, but it is another thing to organize programs around the basic concerns of the community.

First principle: The community is entirely responsible for the production of its programs.

Second principle: The community itself must furnish the human resources and must organize itself financially to ensure its programming.

Third principle: Programming must be oriented toward exact community objectives.

Fourth principle: The operation must involve the greatest possible number of citizens. Ideally, anyone in the community could participate at any level of responsibility in the organization.



Fifth principle: The people charged with the direct operation of community television should be exclusively concerned with the goals of the community television, to avoid possible conflicts of interests that could occur."<sup>12</sup>

Société Nouvelle's approach led to the citizen's committee in Saint-Felicien negotiating a contract with the cable owner making them the programmers for the community channel.

Besides these major projects there is a great deal of activity around the cable community channel. Since the development has been at the discretion of the cable owner there has been a wide range of approaches. The owner in the small town of Madoc, Ontario re-invests all the profits, helps train people and puts on popular Sunday show. Community media groups have formed: Teled in Halifax, Downtown Television and Trinity Square in Toronto. Except perhaps the Fort McMurry Broadcasting Society in B.C., nothing in English-speaking Canada has paralleled the organized relationships between community television committees and the cable operators in Saint-Félicien, Québec City's Assembly or St. Pascal de Kamouraska's Centre Social St. Pascal Inc.

In order to obtain means to provide the kinds of communication necessary for their community programming groups are becoming licensees. Wired World Kitchener-Waterloo 1973, Vancouver

<sup>12</sup>Translated from a brief from Challenge for Change/Société Nouvelle to the CRTC, April 1971. Quoted in "Community Television in Normandin, Québec" in Newsletter Challenge for Change No. 8 (Montréal: Challenge for Change, 1972), pp. 12-16.



Co-operative Radio BC. 1974, Radio Centreville Montréal 1974 as well as several remote stations have followed the difficult route of becoming independent non-profit community radio stations. These stations in all their activities attempt to interact as closely as possible with their communities.

This is usually called community accessibility. Each activity of the station such as the decision-making process, the type of equipment or the membership can be considered in this way. But each station develops direct and delegated involvement suitable for its own local context.

In urban environments this process is more explicit than in small remote settlements where interaction is often unavoidable, where programming demands are less but are sometimes the only local service. Some of the basic goals can be generalized as follows:

1. Commitment to local community needs.
2. Commitment to 'media literacy'. This includes equipment easily approachable by 'non-professionals', workshops in equipment operation and program production. Reducing the role of the middle man and awe of equipment.
3. Development of audience and community participation in the program formats, policy and planning.
4. Ownership by community members.
5. The development of decision-making structures to enable participation and community control or accountability at many levels.





Since 1970 the use of radio for community communications has increased dramatically. There are now twenty-three community radio stations both licensed and unlicensed. Some of the practical reasons for this compared to television are its equipment simplicity and flexibility and its fewer demands on the energy of community volunteers. These characteristics as well as its coverage of scattered communities (cable is still an urban phenomenon) are especially important for small remote communities.

In the North there have been local radio stations, built by locals (often army people) and run voluntarily to serve their communities. In fact when CBC began their Northern Service in 1958 they shut down two volunteer stations in Hay River and Dawson substituting regional programming. CBC has some 205 low-power relay transmitters that provide service to sparsely populated areas. The CBC community radio office, begun in 1970-71, has developed a plan allowing small communities to use these for their own local communication needs. Three experiments were begun: at Fort Good Hope, a Hare Indian Community; at Rankin Inlet, an Inuit settlement; and at Espanola, a Northern Ontario mining town. Since then Fort Franklin and Sioux Lookout have also attained access to transmitters. The uses for this broadcast time are to be available for



emergency announcements, to enhance internal communication, to help people exchange information, to identify subjects of importance and bring them into public discussion. For these uses the CBC Community Radio Office feels it should be able to supply cheap, durable, solid, easily maintained studio equipment for voice transaction, cassette recorders, voice microphones, and links to telephone systems. There is, as of June 24, 1974, a CBC policy on community broadcasting in remote or isolated northern communities. In effect it says: be democratically organized and representative; incorporate as a broadcasting organization; write out a contract with the CBC; provide volunteers and premises; assume responsibility for programming; raise the funds needed over and above technical assistance from the CBC. This same kind of relationship between the CBC and communications groups has permitted the only present example of community controlled programming over a broadcast television channel: the La Ronge Communications Society in Saskatchewan regularly programs its own material on the CBC television relay transmitter.

In this paper participatory forms of broadcasting with access to licensees' facilities have been mentioned, participatory non-broadcast uses of media have been indicated and finally





a small but distinct sector of the broadcasting spectrum has been described. Traditional CBC service provides professional quality programming through which Canadians speak to Canadians. The community sector differs from the traditional CBC in the immediate local service it can provide and in its approach to program production which is deliberately unspecialized and 'hands on'. The community stations are attempting to participate as intimately as possible in their local communication needs.



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